

MITCH BEATY
UT EXTENSION

ADVANCED CONSTITUTION “We the People”

DESCRIPTION

For 6th through 8th grade students.

This is a lesson designed to help students better understand the US Constitution. The lesson takes an interactive approach to breaking down and explaining the 7 Articles in a simple way which is easy to understand and remember. It is designed to be used in conjunction with the School House Rock Video “The Preamble.” However, it can be taught easily without it.

OBJECTIVES

To help students to better understand the Constitution and how it works.

TIME REQUIRED TO DELIVER LESSON

One class period of 45-55 minutes

OPENING IDEAS and DISCUSSION

Start by saying:

- “How many of you are real familiar with the constitution? What is an Article for example and which Articles are still important to us?”
- “Well, we are going to learn more about the Constitution over the next few minutes.”
- Optional: “I’m going to start by playing a Schoolhouse Rock video about the Constitution.”
- Play “The Preamble” 3minutes

BODY OF LESSON

- Pass out all of the Pieces; there are 30. (Try to give the preamble piece to a student who reads fairly well.)
- “Here is a painting of our founding fathers getting ready to sign the constitution... does anyone know where this took place?” Constitutional Hall in Philadelphia (bring up that piece)
- “And it happened in what year?” 1787 (bring up that piece)
- “Ok, let’s talk about the Preamble. Does anyone know what a Preamble is? It is an introductory statement that sets the stage for what is to come.”
- “What are some questions that our Constitutional Preamble sought to answer?”
- (Bring up pieces...

- “Why are we doing this? And, who are we doing this for?”
- “So let’s look at the Constitution and see if it does what our Preamble said it would do.”
- “OK, does anyone know what an Article is? It is a fancy word for part.”
- “OK, how many Articles are in our Constitution? Seven - as you can see here on the board.”
- “Many people think the Constitution is a really hard document to understand but it’s pretty simple with only 7 parts.”
- “Let’s look at Article 1. It set up the first of three branches of government we have. Does anyone know which one?” The Legislative... (bring up piece)
- “What is the main function of this branch? To create laws.”
- “In what National landmark does our Legislature meet?” (Bring up Capitol)
- “Now what do we call our legislature on the National Level? The Congress.”
- “We have two parts to the legislature does anyone know what they are? The Senate and the House of Representatives.” (Bring up those pieces) {Can talk about how many of each-each state has: Senate 2 per state, House is based on population but roughly one for every 700,000 people }
- “Let’s look at Article 2. It set up the second branch of government. Does anyone know which one?” The Executive... (bring up piece)
- “What is the main function of this branch? To enforce laws.”
- “Now what office heads up the Executive Branch? The President. Someone should have a piece that has his house.” (Bring up White House)
- “So Article 2 defines the President and his duties. One of which is that he is the Commander-in-Chief of all Armed forces.” (bring up tank)
- “He is also the head of state and is our representative to meet with other heads of states from other countries.” (bring up flags)
- “Let’s look at Article 3. It set up the final branch of government. Does anyone know which one?” The Judicial... (bring up piece)
- “What is the main function of this branch? To interpret laws.”
- “Now what group of people heads up this branch?” The Supreme Court (bring up Supreme Court Building) “This court is referred to as the highest court in the land.”
- “So Article 3 defines the court system... it provides for trial by jury in criminal cases (bring up jury) and discusses the terms and duties of all judges.”
- “It also talks about Treason.” (bring up upside down flag) “Treason is a crime against the United States...this article defines exactly what that is.”
- “Let’s look at Article 4. Does anyone know what the official name of our country is? It is the United States of America. It’s always important to remember that our country is not one entity but 50 individual states which make up the whole. Each of those states is free to make laws that govern them. That’s what Article 4 deals with...the states” (bring up states piece)
- “So Article 4 discusses the method by which new states would be admitted to the union.” (bring up State shapes)

- “It also guarantees a Republican form of government of the people, by the people and for the people. Not by kings or other royalty.” (bring up crown)
- “How often do you decide to do something and you follow through exactly the way you planned? Sometimes, maybe. But, many times we have to change our approach because situations change. For example, in the early years of the National Football League everyone wore pretty much the same uniform. Home teams wore dark uniforms that were either black or dark blue and visiting teams wore white. This changed drastically in the early 70’s when teams began to wear bright colored uniforms like red, yellow, purple etc. Does anyone know why? People began to get color TV’s! Before then they could not see the bright colors on their TV’s so the NFL changed.”
- “Well, the framers of our Constitution knew our country would change as well, so Article 5 was put in to define how to amend or update the constitution.” (bring up Amendments piece)
- “In this Article, they defined the whole amendment process... how those amendments would be introduced, how they would pass or be rejected, and even how they could be repealed or erased.” (bring up process piece)
- “The framers themselves actually went ahead and added the first 10 amendments when they wrote the initial constitution. Does anyone know what these amendments are called?” The Bill of Rights (bring up that piece)
- “Does anyone know any of the basic freedoms that the bill of rights addressed? Freedom of Speech, Freedom of Press, Religion, the right to bear arms and to assemble are a few. These were freedoms so basic that they felt that they should be addressed from the start.”
- “Does anyone have any idea how many amendments we have had to our constitution? Twenty-seven - with the last one being ratified in 1992.”
- “Two notable amendments are the 13th amendment which was ratified in 1865 and abolished slavery... and the 19th amendment which became law in 1920 and gave women the right to vote.” (bring up those pieces)
- “Article 6 deals with the United States as a country. Does anyone know what the term Sovereign means? It means Supreme Authority over an area or place. This Article states that the United States is a Sovereign Country or the Supreme Authority in this land.. America.” (bring up Sovereignty piece)
- “So really what does this mean? Well, it means that within our country we make the rules and abide by them... no other country has influence over us. A good example of this came in the early 1800’s when the British who were in a war with France decided to impress or capture American sailors and force them to serve in their war. This angered the United States people to the point they decided to declare war on Britain. This became the war of 1812.”
- “The seal (bring up seal) is one of the official symbols of our country. It includes a couple other National Symbols... the flag and the Eagle.”
- “Article 7 deals with how the Constitution would be ratified or accepted into law.” (bring up Ratification piece)

- “Why was this important? Believe it or not our original states were very independent and it wasn’t a foregone conclusion that they would all accept one singular law of the land.”
- “How many original states were there? Thirteen. How many had to ratify the constitution before it went into effect? Nine according to this Article. (bring ip the piece with 13 original states)
- “Ok, let’s check and see how well the preamble set the stage for the Constitution.” (bring up the Preamble piece and reread it)
- “In true democratic fashion let’s vote to ratify this preamble... how many say it does a good job of setting the stage...how many opposed?”
- “It is ratified!”
- “Any final Questions?”

THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS TO ASK

- Each of the Articles can be simplified or expounded on depending upon the audience and the time available. Here are some opportunities:
 - Preamble
 - Talk a lot about the Preamble, what the words mean (Posterity, Common Defense, Domestic Tranquility, etc. etc.)
 - Article 1
 - Talk about Congress, developing laws, who each of their lawmakers are...etc.
 - Article 2
 - Talk more about head of state and commander-in-chief and what that means. Could also talk more about the cabinet and the departments associated with each of the cabinet positions... just instill that the President enforces or makes sure that the laws which were passed by the Congress are carried out.
 - Article 3
 - Talk about what it means to interpret something. Talk about by what standard the Supreme court interprets laws (the Constitution).
 - Talk about Treason and what it is and some examples of what would be treason. (Selling secrets or working for another government, spying, etc.)
 - Talk about the court system, trails by jury, where juries come from, etc.
 - Article 4
 - Talk about when Tennessee became a state, what new places might become the 51st state... Puerto Rico, Guam, Virgin Islands, how long has it been since we had a new state?
 - Talk about Extradition and what that means...use examples like the “Mary Winkler Case” or the case of the prison escape in Roane

County where the couple was arrested in Ohio and brought back to Tennessee.

- Talk about why having a democratic republic was so important to the founding fathers...(because they had all be mistreated in some way by the British Crown)
- Article 5
 - Talk more about the amendment process, other famous amendments... what are some future amendments that we may see.
- Article 6
 - Talk more about the concept of sovereignty... some examples of when other countries may not honor our sovereignty...do we always honor other country's sovereignty...the answer is no...particularly during times of war.
 - Talk about the National Seal and the other symbols on it.
- Article 7
 - Talk about the ratification process. What does it mean to ratify it? What would have happened if it was not ratified?
- Leave students with:
 - Bookmark with the Seven Articles. (Optional)
 - Handout they can use to work along with the lesson. (Optional)